



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 27 March 2022

Lent 4 - Mothering Sunday

God loves us all as a perfect parent loves their children, so let us come together with joy to worship our heavenly Father.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"We had to celebrate and rejoice, because... he was lost and has been found." Luke 15:32

An Illustration to set the scene

Most clubs have rules governing who can join them.

If you want to become a member you may need to be a certain age, gender or background. Such rules exist to ensure the organisation meets the needs of those for whom it was created.

A Probus club, for example, is aimed at retired professionals and has rules to ensure that only people of a certain age and background can become members.

Similarly, youth groups have rules to ensure that they are filled with teenagers rather than adults and young children.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were a type of club.

They were trying to establish a group for people who were dedicated to holiness and to pleasing God.

Their rules were designed to help them achieve this by guiding them in their behaviour.

They were forbidden from sharing meals with people they considered sinners, for example, believing them to be bad influences.

Jesus, however, went out of his way to break their rules.

This incensed the Pharisees, who could not understand why a holy man would mix with sinners.

The parable of the prodigal son is Jesus' answer.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

The younger son was exactly the type of person the Pharisees would have thought sinful.

Asking for his father's inheritance was considered deeply disrespectful (*perhaps the equivalent of wishing his father dead*).

He then squandered the money on riotous living, ending up in a job forbidden to any law-abiding Jew: feeding swine.

In this desperate state he thought of home, imagining his only chance of returning to be as a servant.

After all he had done, he did not expect to be accepted back as a son.

However, as soon as his father saw him on the horizon he ran and embraced him.

There was no mention of wrongdoing, nor any question of him coming back as a servant.

He was instantly reinstated as a beloved child (a son) and showered with gifts – a robe, a ring, sandals, even a party – so overjoyed was the father to have his son back.

His other son, however, did not believe that his brother should be welcomed back into the family group, certainly not unconditionally.

In reply, the father didn't dispute his younger son's failings, but explained that forgiveness was simply the natural thing for him to do – any loving parent (father) would rejoice when a child returned, no matter how badly they had behaved.

Perhaps this has happened in your family – perhaps you were the one who went away and then returned.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The older son did not want anything to do with his sinful brother and refused to share a family meal with him, just as the Pharisees did not want to mix with sinful members of God's people.

The son had **forgotten the unconditional nature of his father's love**: all the hard work he had done could not make his father love him any more than he already did.

Similarly, his brother's unfaithfulness could not prevent his father from loving him or longing for his return.

A parent's love is not earned but freely given.

The father appealed to the older son to follow his example and show the same kind of generous love to his brother.

“We had to celebrate and rejoice,” he said.

Jesus intended this as a message to the Pharisees.

They were not pleasing their heavenly Father simply by focusing upon their own spiritual development and behaviour while avoiding and condemning those who fell short of their standards. God expected them to be concerned for all God's children, no matter how far they had strayed.

There is a similar message for us, too.

God longs for the Church to respond towards those who are far from God as a distressed parent would feel about losing their child.

The Church, therefore, cannot simply be a club designed around the desires and needs of its members.

As the former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, said, ***“The Church is the only society on earth that exists for the benefit of non-members.”***

Jesus saw his mission as reaching out to those far away from their heavenly Father and this parable reminds us that this is a mission he expects us to share.

As we mark Mothering Sunday on this 4th Sunday of Lent we are reminded of the eternal invitation of ‘mother Church’ to welcome those who come back to God in Christ Jesus. And for those who are parents, today offers a challenge to offer unending love to those who we consider our children – not matter what they do that we choose to be upset by.

Tradition indicates on Mothering Sunday we visit the church building where we were baptised – whether in physical reality or in our prayers. Each of us has had our moments of ‘running away’ and today we mark the memory that we can all be welcomed back in to the arms of God and receive one of those live giving and affirming hugs – whether physical or spiritual.

“We had to celebrate and rejoice, because... he was lost and has been found.” *Luke 15:32*

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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